

BALTIMORE NEWS AMERICAN
22 AUGUST 1980**JACK ANDERSON****An invasion would bolster
Carter's sagging ratings**

■ *This is the fifth in a series of controversial columns by Jack Anderson which claim that President Carter has developed a secret plan to invade Iran on the eve of the election. The White House denies the existence of such a plan.*

Jimmy Carter studies the polls the way gypsies read tea leaves. The secret soundings of his favorite pollster, Pat Caddell, go directly to the president for his personal scrutiny. These polls show a national crisis would produce a rally-round-the flag reaction, which would boost his re-election prospects.

This is the real reason, in the opinion of insiders, that Carter has ordered preparations for a limited invasion of Iran in October. There are three stops along the road to invasion where he could pause, reconsider and turn back. He has already passed the first stop; the military forces are now moving into position.

The best evidence that Carter's motives are political can be found in the polls that guide him. Sources with access to Caddell's polls say they show (1) that international events have a strong impact on the public; (2) that the reaction is almost immediate; (3) that the holding of American hostages in Iran has stirred deeper emotions than any foreign policy issue in recent times and (4) that the hostage issue is so volatile it could explode in the president's face.

Even more to the point, the polls show there's nothing like a grave, protracted, international crisis to lift a president's approval rating.

Carter entered the White House in January, 1977, with a 71 percent approval rating. This skidded to 51 percent after the Bert Lance scandal, then plummeted to 28 percent by the time he signed the SALT II treaty in June 1979.

But five months later, the Iranian hotheads stormed the U.S. Embassy and seized the hostages. There was disturbing evidence that Carter's mishandling of the shah of Iran had been the direct cause of the hostage capture. Yet the polls registered an immediate jump in Carter's popularity from 31 percent to 38 percent.

Then the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and a wave of patriotism swept Carter's approval rating up to 61 percent. Slowly, he began to slip again until in July his standing with the public sank lower than any president in modern times.

Yet there was a surprising, if brief, upward spurt in his rating after the hostage rescue attempt. Although the mission was botched, Carter's display of manhood brought him sudden, new approval. The polls show that Americans are eager, as one source told my associate Dale Van Atta, to prove their country "is not the gutless wonder the Iranians think it is."

A John Wayne-style assault on Iran, the polls indicate, would make Carter an overnight hero. Even a routine success in foreign affairs, according to one study, would increase his rating by 12.5 percentage points.

The electorate, said one expert, "is particularly volatile now and responsive to new events." The effect of the Iranian and Afghanistan crises boosted Carter's popularity about eight percentage points higher than previous presidents had registered in 30 similar cases, dating back to 1938.

These statistics had more to do with Carter's decision to attack Iran than any other development, insiders believe.

■ *Jack Anderson is a syndicated investigative reporter.*